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ABSTRACT

This study sought to determine preservice teachers' perceptions of qualities exhibited by effective teachers, and differences in perceptions among groups of preservice teachers categorized on the basis of four background variables: (1) academic major; (2) sex; (3) cumulative grade point average; and (4) stage of academic development in a teacher preparation program. Subjects of the study were 336 preservice teachers. The survey instrument used in the study collected background information and ratings on 19 different qualities as to whether they were very important, important, or not important for effective teachers. An analysis of the findings noted as significant that considerations of pedagogy, subject-matter knowledge, and concern for students were all represented among the set of teacher qualities rated most highly. Results indicated a tendency among elementary and special education majors to attach more importance to certain student-centered qualities than did secondary and health and physical education majors. Secondary majors tended to attach more importance to certain subject-matter qualities. Survey findings are presented in tables. (JD)

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PRESERVICE TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF QUALITIES EXHIBITED BY EFFECTIVE TEACHERS

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INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

The topic of teacher effectiveness has received substantial attention during the current reform movement in education. National commissions, state legislatures, school boards, and others are calling for the recruitment, preparation, and employment of individuals who are effective teachers.[1] According to one source, most definitions of teacher effectiveness include "success in socializing students and promoting their affective and personal development in addition to success in fostering mastery of formal curricula."[2] Although the research on teacher effectiveness has been extensive, few studies have dealt with the qualities exhibited by good teachers as perceived by preservice teachers. The present study, which focuses specifically on preservice teachers, can be significant to teacher educators and others concerned with the development of effective teachers.

The literature on teacher effectiveness has been particularly revealing during the past 20 to 30 years. In reviewing and synthesizing many of the research findings, Cruickshank presented a profile of an effective teacher.[3] Some of the teacher qualities included in the profile are: well-organized, efficient, task oriented, knowledgeable, verbally fluent, aware of student developmental levels, clear, enthusiastic, self-confident, confident about student abilities, hold high expectations, friendly and warm, encouraging and supportive, attentive, accepting, and tolerant. Specific teaching skills are further delineated in the categories of classroom organization, didactic teaching, and classroom management. Based on his review, Cruickshank concluded that there is now substantial evidence about who is a good teacher and that "the behaviors of effective teachers can be and to some extent have been found."

A somewhat different tack is taken by Berliner in a published interview with Brandt.[4] In commenting on the "expert teacher," Berliner suggested that researchers should go beyond descriptions of academic climate variables to "get inside the heads" of the very best teachers to find out why they do as they do. Why, for example, do expert teachers suddenly change a routine that has worked perfectly for 30 days in a row? According to Berliner, "They know something we don't. We'd like to find out what."

After observing many "good teachers in good schools" as site visitors for the Secondary Schools Recognition Program (1983-1985), sponsored by the United States Department of Education, Ducharme and Kluender suggested that competent teachers should demonstrate not only the craft of teaching but also the "art of teaching."[5] Examples of artful teaching which they observed included: "what-if" exercises as part of a science experiment; provocative, insightful discussions in an English classroom prompted by student questions about a novel; and, making stories "come alive" in a junior high language arts class. Ducharme and Kluender characterized artful teaching as that in which "one sees a sense of wonder, an excitement in the subject matter, the free play of imagination, a what-if vision of the world, an evoking of the unknown, and synthesis."

The aforementioned references illustrate the variety of considerations in teacher effectiveness and present several challenges for the future. Because preservice teachers are at a unique stage in their development, their perceptions are important to the growing data base on teacher effectiveness.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The purpose of the study was two-fold: (1) to determine preservice teachers' perceptions of qualities exhibited by effective teachers, and (2) to determine differences in perceptions among groups of preservice teachers categorized on the basis of four background variables. The background variables were: (1) academic major, (2) sex, (3) cumulative grade point average, and (4) stage of academic development in a teacher preparation program.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Conducted during the 1986-87 academic year, the study consisted of 336 preservice teachers enrolled in a public four-year college. The subjects, all of whom had chosen a major in education, were randomly selected from three populations: (1) preservice teachers with little or no teaching experience, (2) preservice teachers who were completing an education course with a teaching/participation component, and (3) preservice teachers who were completing the student teaching experience.

Subjects responded to a survey instrument developed by the researchers. The first section of the instrument collected background information on the respondents, and the second section required respondents to rate 19 different qualities as being very important, important, or not important for effective teachers.

The data were analyzed using frequency tabulations and one-way analyses of variance at the .05 level.

RESULTS

Specific findings of the study are identified in Tables I through VI. Some of the major findings of the study include:

1. The qualities of good teachers most often rated as very important were: explain subjects clearly, express interest in students as individuals and not just learners, enjoy their teaching, are knowledgeable in each subject they teach, and work with all students to help them achieve their potential.
2. The qualities most often rated as not important were: rely on principal to take care of most discipline problems, and use negative reinforcement often as a measure to correct student behavior.
3. Among those qualities rated by a majority of the respondents as either important or very important, three qualities were rated important more frequently than very important. These were: are involved in extra curricular activities, assign homework on a regular basis, and return students' written work promptly.
4. Someone has talked encouragingly with over 90% of the respondents about being a teacher. Those who have talked most often include family members, friends, college teachers, and high school teachers.
5. Most of the individuals surveyed became interested in teaching during high school or college. However, one out of every four became interested in teaching either before the age of 13 or after the age of 22.
6. A majority of the preservice teachers have relatives who have served as teachers.
7. Eight out of ten respondents plan to enter teaching immediately following graduation.

8. Calculation of analysis of variance revealed a number of significant differences.

   a. Eleven differences were identified between groups categorized on the basis of academic major; elementary and special education majors rated several qualities as more important than did secondary and health and physical education majors. Secondary majors rated "assigning homework on a regular basis" as more important than did elementary or special education majors.

   b. Two differences between males and females existed; females attached more importance to "communicating needs and progress of students with parents" and to "monitoring student work in the classroom."

   c. When respondents were categorized on the basis of grade point average, three differences between groups were found.

   d. Two differences were identified between the group with little or no teaching experience and the group completing the student teaching experience. The former attached more importance to "communicating needs and progress of students with parents," and the latter rated "humor" as more important.

EDUCATIONAL IMPORTANCE

Several implications and questions emerged from the study. First, it is significant that considerations of pedagogy, subject-matter knowledge, and concern for students are all represented among the set of teacher qualities rated most highly. Preservice teachers apparently view effective teachers as exhibiting a combination of these aspects of teaching, as opposed to feeling that any simple aspect is sufficient for effectiveness.

The results of the study indicate a tendency among elementary and special education majors to attach more importance to certain student-centered qualities than do secondary and health and physical education majors. On the other hand, there was a tendency for secondary education majors to attach more importance to certain subject-matter qualities than did elementary and special education majors. While these observations are not contrary to the experience of many teacher educators, they do raise questions such as: should teacher education curricula contain elements which sensitize students to these tendencies?

As expected, most students in the study became interested in teaching while in high school or college. However, a significant percentage developed an interest either prior to high school or beyond the typical college age. Recruitment procedures for teacher education programs should be broadened to insure that these age ranges are informed about teaching as a career.

Finally, because so many individuals who are now preservice teachers have been talked with encouragingly about becoming a teacher, it may be important to find additional ways to inform certain subpopulations of the challenges and benefits of teaching.

TABLE I
BACKGROUND INFORMATION
Percentages

1. Current Cumulative G.P.A.:

1.5-1.9	= 0	3.0-3.4	= 33.8%
2.0-2.4	= 6.2%	3.5-3.9	= 19.6%
2.5-2.9	= 38.6%	4.0	= 1.8%

2. Institutional affiliation as a student:

Enrolled at Georgia Southern for all courses of study	= 44.8%
Enrolled at GSC for all courses except transient	= 14.8%
Transferred to GSC as a junior college graduate	= 12.2%
Transferred to GSC from a junior college with no degree	= 13.4%
Transferred to GSC from a senior college/university	= 14.8%

3. Major:

Art	= .6%	Secondary	= 26.9%
Early Childhood	= 32.0%	Special Education	= 13.3%
Health & PE	= 9.5%	Trade & Industry	= .9%
Music	= 1.5%	Middle Grades	= 11.2%
		Other	= 4.1%

4. Current Stage of Academic Development:

Entering block	= 36.8%
Completing block	= 33.2%
Completing student teaching	= 30.0%

5. Employment Projections:

Accept employment outside of education	= 4.4%
Study at the graduate level	= 11.5%
Teach	= 24.0%
Teach and enter graduate study	= 56.8%
Other	= 3.3%

6. Race:

Black	= 7.1%	Other	= 2.3%
White	= 90.6%		

7. Sex:

Female	= 79.4%
Male	= 20.6%

TABLE I
(Continued)

8. Has anyone ever talked encouragingly with you about becoming a teacher?

Yes = 90.6%
No = 9.4%

9. If you circled yes, please indicate the relationship of the person(s) to you:

		Yes	No
College Teacher	=	41.2%	58.8%
Elementary Principal	=	10.4%	89.6%
Elementary Teacher	=	28.7%	71.3%
Family Member	=	56.8%	43.2%
Friend	=	52.1%	47.9%
High School Counselor	=	9.8%	90.2%
High School Principal	=	9.8%	90.2%
High School Teacher	=	34.1%	65.9%

10. At what age did you become interested in teaching?

12 years and under	=	13.7%
13-17 years	=	28.6%
18-22 years	=	43.8%
23 and older	=	13.9%

11. Have any of your relatives served as teachers?

Yes = 63.1%
No = 36.9%

TABLE II
WHAT ARE QUALITIES ARE EXHIBITED BY EFFECTIVE TEACHERS?
Percentages

Effective classroom teachers:	Very Important	Important	Not Important
a. are humorous	50.4%	46.9%	2.7%
b. are involved in extracurricular activities	21.8%	66.7%	11.5%
c. are knowledgeable in each subject they teach	89.7%	10.0%	.3%
d. assign homework on a regular basis	8.9%	51.6%	39.5%
e. communicate needs and progress of students with parents	80.0%	19.7%	.3%
f. concentrate on helping exceptional learners achieve their potential	77.6%	22.4%	0
g. enjoy their teaching	90.6%	9.4%	0
h. explain subjects clearly	91.2%	8.2%	.6%
i. express interest in students as individuals and not just learners	90.8%	8.6%	.6%
j. monitor students work in the classroom	62.3%	36.2%	1.5%
k. rely on the principal to take care of most of the discipline problems	2.9%	20.3%	76.8%
l. return students' written work promptly	49.1%	49.7%	1.2%
m. use a variety of discipline techniques	49.9%	44.2%	5.9%
n. use a variety of instructional strategies	83.2%	15.6%	1.2%
o. use media in instruction	58.2%	40.0%	1.8%
p. use a variety of methods to evaluate students	56.7%	40.9%	2.4%

TABLE II
(Continued)

	Very Important	Important	Not Important
q. use negative reinforcement often as a measure to correct student behavior	5.1%	35.7%	59.2%
r. use positive reinforcement often as a measure to correct student behavior	66.8%	29.9%	3.3%
s. work with all students to help them achieve their potential	89.7%	10.0	.3%

TABLE III
ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE
Significant Differences Between Groups Categorized on the Basis of Academic Major

Variable	Level of Significance	Direction of Significance
1. Assign homework on a regular basis	.0000	SEC > ECE,SpE
2. Communicate needs and progress of students with parents	.0000	ECE > H&PE,SEC MG > H&PE SpE > H&PE
3. Concentrate on helping exceptional learners achieve their potential	.0003	ECE > SEC
4. Monitor student work in the classroom	.0147	ECE > H&PE
5. Use a variety of discipline techniques	.0000	SpE > SEC ECE > SEC
6. Use a variety of methods to evaluate students	.0010	ECE > H&PE

ECE: Early Childhood
H&PE: Health and Physical Education
MG: Middle Grades
SEC: Secondary
SpE: Special Education

TABLE IV
ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE
Significant Differences Between Groups Categorized
on The Basis of Sex

Variable	Level of Significance	Direction of Significance
1. Communicate needs and progress of students with parents	.0000	F > M
2. Monitor student work in the classroom	.0085	F > M

TABLE V
ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE
Significant Differences Between Groups Categorized
on the Basis of Grade Point Average

Variable	Level of Significance	Direction of Significance
1. Use a variety of discipline techniques	.0005	3.0-3.4 > 2.0-2.4 3.5-3.9 > 2.0-2.4
2. Use media in instruction	.0026	3.0-3.4 > 3.5-3.9

4.0 : A
3.0 : B
2.0 : C
1.0 : D

TABLE VI
ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE
Significant Differences Between Groups Categorized
on the Basis of Stage of Academic Development

Variable	Level of Significance	Direction of Significance
1. Are humorous	.0113	3 > 1
2. Communicate needs and progress of students with parents	.0249	1 > 3

1 - Entering Block
2 - Completing Block
3 - Completing Student Teaching

REFERENCE LIST

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